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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to determine whether the career progress of Merit Scholars was significantly related to their early religious backgrounds. Information about religious backgrounds and post-college religious preferences was obtained from 1,324 students who received Merit awards in 1956 and 1957. Other information concerning: family background, father's occupation, family income, scholastic ability, academic achievements and aspirations, career choices, activities and marital status, political positions, and importance of goals, was collected between 1956 and 1965. The Scholars were compared on these variables according to their religious background and their sex. (Author)

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Progress of Merit Scholars: Does Religious Background Matter?

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NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARSHIP CORPORATION

Edward C. Smith, President

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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to determine whether the career progress of Merit Scholars was significantly related to their early religious backgrounds. Information about religious backgrounds and post-college religious preferences was obtained by questionnaire from 1,324 students who received Merit awards in 1956 and 1957. Religious preference information was not known, however, at the time the Scholars were initially chosen. 67% of the males were reared as Protestants, 15% as Catholics, and 11% as Jews. The comparable percentages for females were 70, 12, and 11. The results suggested that Merit Scholars are not as likely as college graduates in general to maintain an identity with their early religious faiths; roughly a quarter to a third of them--Protestants, Catholcs, and Jews--no longer claimed allegiance to their background religion. Scholars reared in these religions were compared on a number of relevant variables.

PROGRESS OF MERIT SCHOLARS: DOES RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND MATTER?

Donivan J. Watley and Rosalyn Kaplan

Is the career progress of able students significantly related to their religious backgrounds? For example, among students who score highest on scholastic ability tests, do the Protestants, Catholics, and Jews differ on academic achievement, personal aspirations, or political preferences? Previous published reports do not suggest a clear-cut answer. Lenski (1961), for example, reported clear differences on factors such as family background, educational attainment, and career decisions among those raised in different religions; but Greeley (1963, p. 138) concluded that the implications of his findings, derived from a national survey of college graduates, "... were so much at odds with those reported in other studies that we suggested we might be witnessing an advanced stage of a major social change in American Catholicism, a change which has accompanied the emergence of American Catholics as the social, political, and economic equals of their fellow Americans."

Most highly able individuals acquire considerable formal education, and it is only to be expected that the college experience does affect the attitudes and values of many students (e.g., Jacob, 1957; Hites, 1965), although no doubt some are influenced more than others. Moreover, various types of colleges influence their students somewhat differently (e.g., Knapp and Greenbaum, 1953). It becomes a reasonable question, therefore, to ask to what extent highly intelligent, highly educated people retain their early religious affiliations.

Longitudinal information about religious backgrounds and post-college religious preferences was obtained by questionnaire from the 1956 and 1957 winners of National Merit Scholarships--the first two years that these awards were given. These Scholars tend to be extremely able individuals: they

scored in the top one percent on national ability norms, they earned high marks in school, and they were highly recommended by school officials.

The religious preference data were collected in 1964, seven to eight years after the Scholars initially entered college. Scholar selection is made without knowledge of religious background. Those reared in different religions were compared on various family background characteristics and on measures of academic ability. They were also compared on their educational attainments, achievements, aspirations and personal goals, political preferences, and career choices. Only the first two groups of Scholars were included in this study in order to increase the likelihood of obtaining stable long-term information on a number of variables, the foremost one being current religious preference.

METHOD

A total of 1,014 males received Merit Scholarships in 1956 and 1957: 403 in 1956 and 611 in 1957. The number of females receiving Merit Scholarships during these years was 368: 152 in 1956 and 216 in 1957.

In the spring of 1964 a followup questionnaire was mailed to the Scholars. One of the items was "In which religion were you reared?" Five alternatives were available: Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Other, or None. They were also asked: "What is your present religious preference?," with the same alternatives provided. The Scholars were classified into the various reared religions in order that comparisons could be made among them on a number of variables. The sexes were analyzed separately.

The data analyzed were collected from several sources. The sources of information used and the number of Scholars for which each source was available are listed in Table 1.

Each source is briefly described as follows:

> The Finalist Information Form contains several kinds of data collected as part of the Scholar selection process: SAT-verbal and SAT-mathematics scores, high school percentile rank (HSR), high school activities, parents' income, amount of initial stipend, precollege major and career plans.

The 1956 Scholar Questionnaire was administered only to 1956 Scholars. It included considerable information in these areas: parents' education and occupation, family finances, home facilities, and vocational planning.

The Survey of Talented High School Graduates was completed only by the 1957 Scholars and contained much of the same information included on the 1956 Scholar Questionnaire.

The 1961 Scholar Followup obtained information about the 1957 Scholars four years after they entered college. This questionnaire stressed the Scholar's educational progress, his career plans, the factors that he believed had influenced his plans. His personal aspirations were examined, as were his self-ratings on a number of personality characteristics.

The 1964 Followup obtained information for both the 1956 and 1957 Scholars. Several kinds of data were collected: academic and vocational achievement, educational and career plans, activities and interest, and religious views.

The 1965 Followup was given to both 1956 and 1957 Scholars; the information obtained pertained largely to educational and career progress.

Table 1

Number of Scholars Completing each Questionnaire Used in this Study

	Males			Females		
Questionnaire	1956	1957	Total	1956	1957	Total
Finalist Information Blank	390	584	974	145	199	344
1956 Scholar Questionnaire	378	--	378	143	--	143
Survey of Talented High School Graduates	--	484	484	--	169	169
1957 Scholar Followup	--	494	494	--	179	179
1964 Followup	388	578	966	152	206	358
1965 Followup	324	498	822	132	178	310
Total Scholars Appointed	403	611	1014	152	216	368

All of the items used from these questionnaires were of the multiple choice type. Although the response rates for these mailed questionnaires were high, the rate for the 1964 questionnaire was unusually high. Completed questionnaires were obtained from 1350 of the 1354 Scholars contacted; usable information pertaining to religious preferences was obtained from 1324. This

high response rate was due to persistent mailed reminders and to a telephone interview with the remaining nonresponders.

RESULTS

Reared Religion

Reared religion data were available for 966 (95%) of the 1014 males. Of those not classified by religious background, 9 were deceased, 19 were not located, and insufficient information was available to classify the remaining 20. Sixty-seven percent were reared as Protestants, 15% as Catholics, 11% as Jews, and 5% claimed no religious background; 18 were reared in "other" backgrounds, but these were eliminated from further analyses because of the small number.

Which of the various religions are over- or under-represented among these male Scholars? The Protestants are slightly over-represented on the basis of the Census data reported in 1957, where 62% of the men (14 and older) were reported to be white and Protestant. Among Greeley's (1963) college graduates, 61% were Protestant (both males and females). The Catholic men are under-represented, while Jews are over-represented. The 1957 Census reported that 28% of the white males were Catholic, whereas about 3% were Jewish; about 4% reported having no religion. Greeley found that 25% of the college graduates were Catholic, 8% Jewish, and 3% were reared in no religion.

Did these men maintain their religious identity after they graduated from college? Religious affiliation was generally less stable among Scholars than Greeley found for college graduates. Table 2 shows that 62% of the Protestants, 75% of the Catholics, and 72% of the Jews still claimed their reared religions, while Greeley reported that the corresponding percentages among college graduates were 85, 91, and 84. On the other hand, while Greeley found that 66% of the "none" group maintained that status, 85% of these Scholars persisted in their claim of accepting no religious doctrine. In short, these males appear even less likely to maintain their religious heritage than is generally found

among college graduates. Almost all of the changers claimed to accept no religious doctrine.

Table 2

Percentages of Merit Scholars Reared in Various Religions who Retained or Changed their Views

Reared Religion	Postcollege Preference				
	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	Other	None
Males					
Protestant	62	--	--	5	32
Catholic	4	75	--	1	19
Jewish	1	--	72	1	26
None	9	--	--	6	85
Females					
Protestant	66	2	--	4	27
Catholic	12	74	--	2	12
Jewish	2	--	65	2	30
None	--	--	--	-	--

Usable information was obtained from all but 10 of the 368 women Scholars; 70% were reared as Protestants, 12% as Catholics, 11% as Jews, and 4% reported no religious background. Ten women had "other" backgrounds. Because of the small numbers involved, however, both the "other" and "none" groups were eliminated from further analyses. Essentially the same results were found for women Scholars as were just reported for men: Protestants and Jews were over-represented but Catholics were under-represented relative to the 1957 Census data and to Greeley's study of 1961 graduates. Regarding the permanence of their religious identifications (Table 2), these able women were just as likely as the men were to relinquish their background religions, many now claiming to accept no religious doctrine.

Family Background

Parental Educational Level. Table 3 shows that the parents of male Scholars reared as Protestants received more formal education than the parents of sons reared as Catholics or Jews. Both Catholic parents were less educated

than those who raised sons in the other faiths. Interestingly, however, the parents of these men are considerably better educated than is generally the case for college graduates (Greeley, 1963).

Table 3
Family Background Characteristics of Merit Scholars
Reared in Different Religions

Background Characteristics	Males				Females		
	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	None	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish
Fathers' Occupation:*							
% in professional occupations	28	25	33	62	49	20	44
% in own business	26	18	46	17	18	30	39
Fathers' Education:							
% completed high school or less	27	43	27	18	23	50	15
% bachelor or higher degree	53	36	48	59	56	35	60
Mothers' Education:							
% completed high school or less	30	54	40	34	24	44	28
% bachelor or higher degree	42	20	35	41	48	35	47
Family Income:**							
% earning less than $7,500	45	59	45	55	53	63	40
% earning $10,000 or more	29	13	37	28	23	14	60

* Information available for 1957 Scholars only.
** Information available for 1956 Scholars only.

The Catholic parents of women Scholars were also the least educated among the three religious groups. While 50% of the Catholic fathers had only a high school education, 60% of the Jewish fathers had at least a bachelor's degree.

Fathers' Occupation. It is striking that 62% of the fathers of male Scholars who professed no religious background were professionally occupied, while no other group had more than 33% (Jews) similarly employed (Table 3). Altogether only 43% of the Catholic fathers worked in the professions or owned businesses, while 46% of the Jewish fathers owned businesses and another 33% were in the professions.

Among the women Scholars, 83% of the Jewish fathers were in professions or owned businesses, whereas 67% of the Protestants and only 50% of the Catholics held similar positions.

Family Income. This information provides some indication of the relative standing of the religious groups when the Scholars initially received their Merit awards. The families of Catholic males tended to earn less than the others, while the Jewish families earned most--37% of them were in the $10,000 or more bracket (Table 3). This result is not consistent, however, with Greeley's findings for 1961 college graduates, since he reported that about 55% of both the Protestant and Catholic families earned less than $7,500; only 43% of the Jews in his study earned less than that amount. Thus, not only did the families of these Scholars generally earn more money than those of college graduates in general, but the differences for the Protestants and Catholics are particularly noteworthy.

Certainly a striking feature for women Scholars is that 60% of the Jewish families earned $10,000 or more, but 63% of the Catholic families earned less then $7,500.

Scholastic Ability

The process of selecting Merit Scholars insures a homogeneous group of extremely high ability students on the basis of test scores. Nevertheless, did those raised in different religions differ in tested scholastic ability?

The answer is yes. The Jewish males obtained higher mean scores on both sections--verbal and mathematics--of the SAT (Table 4). On the verbal section, the Jewish and "None" groups both scored significantly higher ($<.01$) on the average than did the Protestant or Catholic Scholars. Similar results were found for the mathematics section, but on this subtest Jewish males also scored significantly higher than the "None" group as well.

The women Scholars raised as Jews obtained significantly higher mean scores

on both sections of the SAT than the Protestants or Catholics. On the verbal section, the Catholic women obtained higher scores (.05 level) than those reared as Protestants.

Table 4
SAT Mean Scores for Scholars with Different Religious Backgrounds

		Males				Females		
		Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	None	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish
SAT-V	Mn	689.3	692.2	710.2	708.4	707.1	719.9	733.2
	SD	41.4	40.6	40.1	29.0	36.0	33.0	21.7
SAT-M	Mn	729.7	721.7	764.9	745.1	684.1	690.3	719.9
	SD	58.4	61.2	39.9	46.9	65.2	66.9	38.8

Academic Achievements and Aspirations

Information about the highest degree obtained by Scholars was obtained during the summer of 1965, eight or nine years after they initially entered college. The Jewish males stand out in attainment of higher degrees, 48% of them having earned a PhD, MD, LLB, or equivalent professional degree by 1965 (Table 5). This relatively high rate of degree attainment was not found, however, among the females. In general, the males of all religious backgrounds

Table 5
Religious Background and the Percentages of Scholars Completing Various Levels of Education

Highest Degree Attained	Religious Background			
	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	None
Male				
Bachelor's or less	39	41	22	38
Master's	35	37	30	38
PhD or equivalent	26	22	48	24
Total N	530	122	86	39
Female				
Bachelor's or less	57	51	50	
Master's	33	46	44	
PhD or equivalent	10	03	06	
Total N	213	37	36	

were much more likely to have attained doctoral level degrees than the female Scholars.

The Jewish males earned higher final college grade averages than the other men. The grade averages, based on a four-point scale, were: Jews 3.53, Catholics 3.41, Protestants 3.35, None 3.23. The obtained F-ratio was significant at the .05 level. For the females, the final grade averages earned by the Catholics (3.56), Jews (3.47), and Protestants (3.42) were fairly similar, and the F-ratio was not significant at the .05 level.

The degree aspirations of Scholars in 1965 are shown in Table 6. The goals of the Jewish men were very high, 90% of them desiring a doctoral level degree. As noted previously (Table 5), 48% already had attained a degree at that level by 1965. Although 23% of the Jews wanted an MD only 4 to 8% of the men with other backgrounds sought that same degree. Among women, fewer Protestants (44%) sought doctoral level degrees than those reared in the other two religions.

Table 6

Percentage of Scholars Reared in Different Religions Aspiring to Various Levels of Formal Education

	Reared Religion			
Degree Planned	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	None
Male				
Bachelor's or less	7	7	5	10
Master's	19	22	5	5
PhD or equivalent	74	71	90	85
Total N	511	117	85	39
Female				
Bachelor's or less	16	20	11	
Master's	40	23	31	
PhD or equivalent	44	57	58	
Total N	210	35	35	

In 1964 the Scholars were asked to indicate the types of achievement or special recognition they had received. Scientific, artistic, musical or literary, business or professional, community or public service, and "other" (i.e.,

an achievement not included in one of the other areas) were the types of honors classified. Excluding the "other" category, more recognition or achievement was earned by males in the scientific area than any of the others, with the Jews (28%) reporting more achievements of this kind than the Protestant (18%), Catholic (14%), or None (15%) groups. No marked differences were found in the other areas. In considering these data, it is well to keep in mind that the great majority of the Scholars were either still in school or had only recently completed their formal schooling.

Two noteworthy results were found for the women. First, when compared with men, far fewer of them won scientific achievements (Protestants 8%, Catholics 9%, Jews 2%). Second, far more of them listed "other" kinds of recognition or achievement: Catholics 53%, Protestants 41%, Jews 38%; the comparable percentages for men were 29, 32, and 19.

Career Choices

To this point we have discussed information about Merit Scholars who entered colleges in 1956 and 1957. The data presented next for career choices were obtained in 1965 from the 1956-1960 Scholars. The availability of information for this larger number of Scholars should provide more stable results regarding the extent to which their precollege career choices were kept or changed by 1965. Information about career plans was available from 94% of those receiving Merit Scholarships during this period. See Watley (1968) for a fuller report of the career plans of the 1956-1960 Scholars.

Data are presented in Tables 7 and 8 only for Scholars raised as Protestants, Catholics, or Jews; Scholars reared in no religious background were eliminated from this analysis because the number was too small to provide stable results. While a substantial proportion of the men in each group initially selected engineering, quite a few of each one subsequently changed to other programs. Only 5% of the Jews actually continued their engineering studies. However,

a much higher percentage of Jews (31%) selected medicine and law as final choices than did the Protestants or Catholics. The proportion of Protestants and Catholics choosing engineering are considerably higher than those reported by Greeley (1963) for college graduates who identified with these doctrines.

Male Scholars not reared in a religion overselected the social sciences, particularly in comparison with the Catholics. Interestingly, 86 to 92% of the males in the various groups indicated that they would choose the same careers again.

Table 7

Religious Background and Percentages of 1956-1960 Male Scholars Choosing Various Career Fields

	Reared Religious Groups								
	Protestant			Catholic			Jewish		
Career	Initial	Final	Change	Initial	Final	Change	Initial	Final	Change
Physical Science	11.2	5.5	- 5.7	15.3	6.7	- 8.6	8.8	5.6	- 3.2
Physics	16.8	8.9	- 7.9	18.0	11.7	- 6.3	16.2	8.8	- 7.4
Math	5.8	10.1	4.3	3.7	5.7	2.0	12.0	13.4	1.4
Biological Science	0.7	2.5	1.8	--	2.0	2.0	0.5	5.1	4.6
Social Science	0.3	4.3	4.0	--	1.0	1.0	--	3.7	3.7
Sociology, Social Work, Psychology	1.4	3.0	1.6	0.3	2.3	2.0	0.5	3.2	2.7
Humanities, Fine Arts	1.9	10.1	8.2	1.3	10.7	9.4	2.8	8.8	6.0
Education	5.4	2.7	- 2.7	6.0	3.7	- 2.3	1.4	0.9	- 0.5
Engineering	28.4	13.0	-15.4	30.0	15.0	-15.0	20.4	4.6	-15.8
Medicine	6.8	7.7	0.9	6.0	5.0	- 1.0	17.1	18.1	1.0
Law	4.4	6.8	2.4	4.7	8.3	3.6	8.8	12.5	3.7
Business	4.4	9.6	5.2	5.0	7.7	2.7	2.3	5.1	2.8
Other profession	9.1	9.4	0.3	9.3	12.3	3.0	4.2	4.2	--
Undecided	3.3	6.4	3.1	0.3	8.0	7.7	5.0	6.0	1.0
Total N	1388			300			216		

A relatively high proportion of the Jewish women (45%) chose the areas of psychology, sociology, and the humanities and the fine arts (Table 8). The field of education initially attracted high proportions of Protestants and Catholics, but many of each faith subsequently transferred into other fields.

In contrast to the Jewish women, relatively more Protestants and Catholics decided to become housewives.

Table 8

Religious Background and Percentages of 1956-1960 Female Scholars Choosing Various Career Fields

	Reared Religious Groups								
	Protestant			Catholic			Jewish		
Career	Initial	Final	Change	Initial	Final	Change	Initial	Final	Change
Physical Science	10.2	4.8	- 5.4	10.7	3.9	- 6.8	10.8	4.0	- 6.8
Physics	3.9	1.5	- 2.4	4.8	3.9	- 0.9	5.4	2.7	- 2.7
Math	4.9	6.9	2.0	4.8	5.8	1.0	10.8	9.4	- 1.4
Biological Science	2.0	4.1	2.1	--	1.9	1.9	4.0	2.7	- 1.3
Social Science	0.5	2.4	1.9	1.0	--	- 1.0	1.4	4.0	2.6
Sociology Social Work, Psychology	3.3	4.3	1.0	1.9	2.9	1.0	8.1	12.2	4.1
Humanities, Fine Arts	4.1	20.3	16.2	6.8	18.4	11.6	8.1	32.4	24.3
Education	35.2	14.6	-20.6	35.0	12.6	-22.4	14.9	5.4	- 9.5
Engineering	2.0	0.5	- 1.5	4.8	1.9	- 2.9	--	--	--
Medicine	7.2	3.6	- 3.6	4.8	--	- 4.8	8.1	6.8	- 1.3
Law	0.5	1.6	1.1	1.9	3.9	2.0	2.7	2.7	--
Business	2.0	1.3	- 0.7	2.9	2.9	--	4.0	--	4.0
Other profession	18.7	8.2	-10.5	17.5	21.4	3.9	18.9	4.0	-14.9
Housewife	0.5	15.9	15.4	--	10.7	10.7	--	4.0	4.0
Undecided	5.1	10.0	4.9	2.9	9.7	6.8	2.7	9.4	6.7
Total N	610			103			74		

Activities and Marital Status

The Scholars reported their major activities during the 1964-1965 academic year. Table 9 shows that the overwhelming proportion of males were either working in their career fields or attending graduate or professional school. Men with no religious background were still in school more often than the others, and less likely to be employed in their chosen career fields. Jews were least likely to be employed outside their career fields.

Protestant women were about twice as likely as Jewish women to report homemaking as a major activity. Nevertheless, about the same proportion of Jewish

Table 9

Percentages of Scholars Reared in Different Religions Who Were Engaged in Various Major Activities During 1964-1965

Major Activity	Reared Religion			
	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	None
Males				
Working in career field	39	41	41	24
Attending graduate school	43	42	48	58
Working in career field and attending graduate school	2	1	5	--
Working, not in career field	12	14	4	13
Attending undergraduate school	--	--	--	5
Other	4	2	2	--
Total N	523	121	85	38
Females				
Working in career field	27	25	34	
Attending graduate school	22	30	34	
Working in career field and attending graduate school	1	6	--	
Working, not in career field	13	8	14	
Homemaker	30	22	11	
Homemaker and noncareer work	2	--	4	
Homemaker and career work	--	3	--	
Other	5	6	3	
Total N	213	36	35	

(61%) and Protestant (65%) women reported that they were married. Jews were more often working in their career fields or attending school. In contrast to the others, only 51% of the Catholic women were married; moreover, 22% of the single Catholic women said that they did not even date. Only 5% of the Protestant women and 3% of the Jewish women said that they never dated. Whereas 11% of the Jewish women were divorced, 4% of the Protestants were divorced; no divorces were reported by Catholic women.

Do women raised in different religious backgrounds have similar marriage and career plans? Data were available from another study (Watley, 1969a) which reported the marriage and career plans of women who received Merit Scholarships between 1956 and 1960. The plans of these women were reanalyzed on the basis of their religious backgrounds (Table 10). Certainly a striking aspect of

Table 10

Percentages of 1956-1960 Women Scholars Reared in Different Religions Reporting Various Combinations of Marriage and Career Plans

Marriage and Career Plans	Reared Religion		
	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish
Married only	10.2	7.0	1.7
Married and deferred career	32.3	26.8	25.0
Married and immediate career	46.7	40.7	66.6
Career only	4.8	17.4*	5.0
No decision yet	6.0	8.1	1.7
Total N	518	86	60

* Includes a number of women who are nuns.

these results is that almost all of the Jewish women planned to embark on their careers immediately. In contrast to the others, the Protestants were more likely to plan for marriage only.

Table 11 reports the percentages of women with different religious backgrounds who reported experiencing various types of major problems in carrying out their marriage and/or career plans. Regardless of background, the major problem reported was that of being pulled in too many directions. The Jewish women expressed more difficulty than the others either in finding a mate or

Table 11

Percentages of 1956-1960 Women Scholars Who Reported Having Experienced These Major Problems in Carrying out their Marriage and/or Career Plans

Major Problems	Reared Religion		
	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish
Not aiming high enough	0.7	--	--
Difficulty finding mate	2.3	--	4.6
Husband's job location	2.3	3.2	7.0
Decreased career ambition	1.6	--	4.6
Frustration, pulled in too many directions	6.5	9.7	7.0
Lack part time employment	0.9	1.6	4.6
Unfair competition with males	1.4	1.6	--
Keeping up with career field	2.1	--	--
Total N	434	62	43

in adjusting to husband's job location. The point should not be overlooked, however, that most of these able women did not report having experienced major problems. Those listed are a compilation of the major problems that they were willing to express.

Table 12 lists the percentages of women reared as Protestants, Catholics, or Jews who reported several major types of problems due to being a woman. Sizeable proportions of each faith believed they had experienced discrimination which they directly attributed to their gender. "Internal conflict" refers to uncertainty about one's proper feminine-masculine role, and "insufficient time" reflected the feeling of being drawn in too many directions.

Table 12

Percentages of 1956-1960 Women Scholars who Reported Having Encountered these Problems Because of Being Female

	Reared Religion		
Major Problems	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish
Discrimination because of sex	18.0	14.5	20.9
Internal conflict	4.4	6.5	11.6
Insufficient time	8.8	4.8	11.6
Total N	434	62	43

Among male Scholars, 62% of the Protestants, 58% of the Catholics, and 54% of the Jews were married by 1965. Only two Protestants and one Catholic reported divorces.

Clear trends were found for the amount of education completed by spouses. Table 13 shows that although 60% of the wives of Jewish Scholars had completed some work in graduate school, only 20% of the wives of Catholics had done so.

The Scholars reported these church activities: teaching Sunday School, church social activities, church choir, or any other church activity. Among males, 19% of the Protestants, 13% of the Catholics, and 7% of the Jews reported some involvement in these activities. The comparable proportions for

Table 13

Percentages of Spouses of Scholars Reared in Various Religions who had Different Levels of Educational Attainment

	Reared Religion			
Spouses' Education*	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	None
Male				
Less than a Bachelors	26	41	17	20
Bachelors degree	33	39	23	35
Completed some graduate work	41	20	60	45
Total N	325	71	48	20
Female				
Less than a Bachelors	13	5	12	
Bachelors degree	16	21	4	
Masters degree	43	37	42	
PhD degree or equivalent	28	37	42	
Total N	147	19	26	

* Information available for 1957 Scholars only.

the females were 23, 33, and 8. The point of these results seems to be that, although the majority of these able people retained some identification with their religious heritages, they were not overly active in the practice of organized religions.

Finally, 12% of the male Protestants, 9% of the Catholics, 27% of the Jews, and 30% of the None group reported that they had received psychotherapy since graduating from high school.

Political Positions

What are the political orientations of these Merit Scholars? Jews of both sexes strongly favored the Democratic view, the orientation which was also most popular among Catholics (Table 14).

Importance of Goals

These Scholars were asked to rate the importance of various life goals. Table 15 reports the proportions who indicated that a particular goal was either "very important" or "essential" to them. It is interesting that the males who claimed no religious background were less likely than the others to

Table 14

Percentages of Scholars Reared in Different Religions who Chose Various Political Orientations

Political Orientation	Reared Religion			
	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	None
Males				
Republican	42	35	9	23
Democrat	35	44	56	37
Independent	17	15	23	24
Socialist	2	2	6	8
Other	4	4	6	8
Total N	618	133	102	51
Females				
Republican	37	36	10	
Democrat	45	55	77	
Independent	14	7	3	
Socialist	2	--	5	
Other	2	2	5	
Total N	245	42	39	

Table 15

Reared Religion and Rated Importance of Personal Goals (in Percentages)

Goals	Males				Females		
	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	None	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish
Becoming an authority	61	53	71	64	42	38	50
Help others	53	54	51	46	67	72	50
Good parent	79	79	78	79	88	76	89
Community leader	29	39	30	18	17	10	6
Being well-liked	44	35	39	14	44	38	34
Financial security	52	47	59	21	38	38	61
Happy and content	63	69	67	67	63	81	89
Find real purpose in life	84	83	59	57	91	90	83
Awards and recognition	20	17	28	18	8	5	11
Become famous	11	7	18	4	4	--	-
Personal maturity	83	86	82	59	94	96	95
Following religious code	18	57	9	7	18	67	6

rate highly goals such as becoming a community leader, being well-liked, attaining financial security and achieving personal maturity. Among the women, proportionately fewer of the Jews rated "helping others" highly, but relatively more considered financial security to be a very desirable goal.

A particularly relevant question pertains to "following a religious code." It is surprising that so few of the Protestants of either sex considered this goal highly important, and one would certainly expect to find a high majority of Catholics rating this an essential goal of their lives. However, when asked, "Do you personally feel that you need to believe in some sort of religious faith or personal philosophy?," only 2% of the Catholic males and 6% of the Protestants answered no; 24% of the Jewish and 22% of the no religious background groups answered no to this question. Among the women, 3% of Protestants, none of the Catholics, and 21% of the Jews answered no. In short, although most Scholars did not highly rate the importance of a formal religious code, most of them nevertheless considered it quite important to maintain some kind of faith or personal philosophy.

They were also asked, "Do you feel that you now have an adequate religious faith or personal philosophy as a guide to your conduct?" The proportions of males reporting yes were: Protestants 63%, Catholics 85%, Jews 57%, and None 72%. For the women, the proportions were Protestants 62%, Catholics 93%, and Jews 47%.

DISCUSSION

What should one really expect to find among these highly able men and women concerning their religious beliefs and practices? We are rather certain that most of them highly prize intellectual and professional attainments (Nichols and Astin, 1966; Watley, 1969b), and that most of them have adopted the role of a "scholar." We also know, however, that the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries have fostered more skepticism among intellectuals regarding the acceptance of orthodox religious doctrine than was formerly the case.

These results provide reason to believe that Merit Scholars are not as likely as college graduates in general to maintain an identity with the religious faith in which they were reared; roughly a quarter to a third of them --Protestants, Catholics, and Jews--no longer claimed allegiance to the faith in which their families raised them. Perhaps we should be on guard, however, against concluding wrongly that those who no longer claim their religious heritage now have no philosophy at all to guide them; nevertheless, whatever their present views may be, it does appear that these do not involve the acceptance of dogma of the traditional orthodox types. Although the tendency among Scholars to give up the religious doctrines of their youth is a clear one, we do not know, of course, to what extent this finding can be generalized to others who are equally able.

Not to be overlooked, however, is the fact that the majority of these bright people, regardless of religious background, still claimed the religions in which they were raised. Certainly it has been well documented that religious belief is still a vital force among large numbers of people, continuing to play a distinctive role in perpetuating and encouraging particular habits, goals, and behavior. Whatever the particulars may be concerning those things that the "loyal" Scholars accept or reject about their religious doctrines, it seems that many of the "acceptables" have been successfully handed down to them. Quite clearly, the great American society, despite its sophisticated techniques of industrialization and mechanization, has not melted down and eliminated altogether the differential effects of cultures and religions. The findings of this research suggest that even the brightest individuals are not immune to such influence.

The most dramatic differences were found for the Jews. For example, educational and professional competence historically have been highly prized among them. Although we might not expect to find noticable differences in educational progress and professional aspiration among individuals singularly distinguished for their intellectual ability and scholarship, the Jewish Scholars nevertheless differed from the others in terms of their aspirations, degree attainments, and achievements; moreover, the Jewish women were considerably more career oriented than those raised in the other faiths. Scholars from Jewish backgrounds also expressed more interest in other matters such as individual distinction and recognition, and in financial reward for their professional skills.

But should we not, after all, expect results like these? People, regardless of personal characteristics such as tested ability, do not grow up in vacuums; no man is, in effect, an island entirely unto himself. No doubt the collegiate experience does affect the views of students, and some of them reach the point where they can no longer accept certain beliefs that were handed to them during their youth. Perhaps the brightest students are more apt than others to question their heritage, or maybe they have a fuller awareness that there are alternative explanations to man and his place in the world. Perhaps like many intellectuals and scientists they are prepared to accept a scientific view of reality, which implies that one should believe only what can be empirically demonstrated. Whatever the reasons may be, it is quite possible, as these results suggest, that exceptionally able people are more inclined than college students in general to disengage themselves from their religious heritage. It is doubtful, however, even among Scholars, that the residue of one's background with its particular teachings, can be removed altogether and the slate wiped entirely clean of the past.

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